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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Committee members. My name is Debbie Squires and I currently serve as a trustee on the Huron Valley Schools Board of Education. I also serve as the Oakland County School Boards Association President, and it is in that capacity that I am here today, representing the 28 districts in Oakland County.

I come before you asking your support of House Bill # 4835, introduced by Rep John Stakoe. This bill would set aside grant dollars to support the start up costs associated with new International Baccalaureate programs in Michigan.

As we become more of a global society we need to address issues such as this.

In a recent trip to Washington DC to speak with our federal officials regarding education issues, a number of us were able to secure a meeting with the Assistant Secretary of the German Embassy. Our intention was to talk about the differences in our educational systems and the many exchange opportunities for both students and staff. But our conversation led however to the International Baccalaureate program. Why, because while companies interested in locating internationally consider various things, one of their top priorities are the educational opportunities for their employee's family members. Since many only stay a few years before returning to their native country, or moving on to another, their educational experiences must be transportable. The IB program offers that.

The recently released Cherry Commission Report states – We must Implement New Strategies for High School Success. As well as – We must Set High Expectations for High School Students through Rigorous Standards and Curriculum. The IB program does both.

If we are to make Michigan a more desirable corporate relocation destination we must consider that available educational opportunities are as important as tax incentives and the like.

In a time when school districts have been challenged to work in a more collaborative manner, Oakland County already has one such successful program in operation, the International Academy. You may remember hearing about it last year when Newsweek Magazine named it the #1 high school in America. Imagine that – a public high school as #1 in the country!

Efforts to expand the International Academy have great support, however continue to meet challenges.

It is not location – we have that at Lakeland High School in Huron Valley.

It is not a lack of student interest – numbers far exceed the available slots each year.

It is certainly not a lack of school district interest – most remaining districts in Oakland County, as well as a number of districts from surrounding counties have expressed an interest in participating. (An option not currently available)

This probably comes as no surprise to any of you that the biggest challenge of all is money. While the program has been well designed to be very cost effective it is still out of reach for many students and districts whose foundation allowance is below the tuition amount necessary. While many of us are working diligently to find other avenues of support – other governmental units, business, etc. those things all take time. And every day we wait, more students lose the opportunity to participate.

The IB program has so many positive benefits both locally and internationally, both academically and economically. This is truly an investment in our future.

I ask you to support HB #4835. Thank you for listening to me today, and Rep. Stakoe, thank you for your continued support on this important topic.